

Transcript of Congressman Bobby L. Rush Opening Remarks
Panel Discussion on Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls

April 12, 2021

RUSH: Good evening and good evening to you, my dear friend Evelyn, and thank you so much for all that you do in representing us on broadcast news in this city, and across the state and the nation. Where would we be without the clear insight and forceful voice of our renowned sister, our beloved Evelyn Holmes? Thank you again, Evelyn, for joining us this evening. Thank you, panelists, for this evening of critical discussion on the pandemic — the other pandemic — that's before us, the pandemic of missing and murdered Black women and girls in our City of Chicago, our very own hometown.

This issue is much, much, much more than just a women's issue. It's an issue of public safety. Your safety, and my safety, the safety of my daughters and granddaughters, my family, my neighbors. This is an issue of families, and not just an issue about women. It is indeed a public safety issue that all of us are affected by. And it is a priority in all of our daily agendas.

It is an issue of policing, my, my, my. And which cases the Chicago Police Department chooses to prosecute or to ignore. It's an issue of race, as there are a disproportionate number of Black women and girls that go missing and are the victims of these and other brutal crimes. While Black Americans make up less than one-third of the population in our city, they make up nearly three-quarters of the city's murder victims. Homicides, though, of Black citizens are solved by the CPD at only half the rate of those who are white citizens.

Nationally, cases involving missing Black women remain open and unresolved four times longer — that's four times longer — than cases that are involving white and Hispanic Americans. And don't stop there. Black and Brown children go missing more often, remain missing longer, far longer, than white children. And it doesn't stop there. To make matters worse, they receive, painfully, far less media coverage.

Seventy-five women, a majority of them Black women, were strangled or smothered in Chicago between the years 2001 and 2017. Yet most of their cases remain unsolved. It was in the wake of this strange and ominous phenomenon that I convened a community alert session, meeting, conversation, to hear from victims' families and local law enforcement, and to ask the Federal Bureau of Investigation to involve themselves in this crime of top priority for our community, to intervene, and to help the city and the state process the evidence that's been backlogged in files and on shelves and in buses and storage containers, evidence that has sat unnoticed, untouched, unrecognized, and uninvolved in the solving of these crimes. I also led an appropriations amendment, which received unanimous support in Congress, to increase funding for a Department of Justice grant program to help clear rape kit backlogs of those that have been languishing in our city.

It remains clear to me that there is a lot more that can be done. A single missing woman or child, no matter their race, creed, color, no matter what their zip code, is indeed, an American tragedy. And America has to step up to the plate. But when the majority of cases — and the majority of unsolved cases — involve Black women, some serious soul-searching needs to take place. It's in the order of the highest significance, and the highest priority. We must do more — and I'm saying this as a Black man, father, husband, uncle, cousin, neighbor — I'm saying this as a Black

man, we must do more to protect our women, our Black women, and girls from these heinous and all-too-common criminals that are perpetrating havoc in our community.

I'm just going to sit back and listen. Get more insight, more information. I want to know more, I want to know what you know. I want to help, and I need your help. We all need your help. This is a community effort, it's only going to get solved when you and I demand not just with our mouths, but with our actions, our activity, our resolve. Only when we demand that this problem is solved once and for all.

Leave our Black women alone. Let's protect our Black women. Thank you all for joining us and I thank, again, our moderator, our distinguished panel of guests, and you, our august audience, for joining us. And I look forward to this panel discussion. God bless.